



## **Re: H.B. No. 5001 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH**

Testimony of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Connecticut  
By Thomas Burr  
Children & Public Health Committees  
February 25, 2022

Senators Abrams, Anwar, Representatives Linehan, Steinberg, and members of the Children & Public Health Committees; my name is Thomas Burr, from Glastonbury CT, and I am the Community and Affiliates Relations Manager of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Connecticut). I am testifying today regarding H.B. No. 5001 – An Act Concerning Children's Mental Health.

NAMI is dedicated to building better lives for those with lived experience with mental health illness and their families. NAMI Connecticut and its nine local affiliates provide support groups and educational programs for people with mental health conditions and their loved ones and advocates for policies to improve the lives of people affected by mental health conditions.

I am the parent of an adult child who is in recovery from bipolar disorder, after 8 years' worth of repeated hospitalizations, incarcerations, and homelessness. Some of the best care he received during his illness occurred right here in Hartford, at the Capital Region Mental Health Center. These were services provided by DMHAS and funded by the State of CT via Husky. My son is now in recovery, living on his own with his wife and daughter, owns his own business; and has been doing very well for the past 15 years!

As you already know, COVID-19 has had, and continues to have a serious impact on the overall mental health of people in Connecticut. The pandemic highlighted the existing mental health crisis in the state and around the country. As a staff member of NAMI Connecticut, I care about mental health for all. We have seen our call volume double during the pandemic and the demand for our online support groups and education programs continues to increase.

The Connecticut nonprofit service provider community, including NAMI Connecticut and the organizations where NAMI refers people with mental health issues and their loved ones for help, struggle to meet the demand for services after years of cuts and austerity. The time to re-invest is NOW!

We gratefully acknowledge the great work of the bi-partisan committee that was instrumental in crafting HB 5001, AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH. However, we feel the following items should also be included:

- Implement annual well-being checks for all K-12 students and staff.

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- Implement curriculum to address additional healthy school climate policies, such as requiring annual school climate surveys, social emotional learning (including instruction on building resiliency).
- Require age-appropriate mental health and suicide prevention education for students, teachers, staff, and parents, such as NAMI's "Ending the Silence" educational program. Information about "Ending the Silence" can be found by visiting: <https://www.nami.org/Support-Education/Mental-Health-Education/NAMI-Ending-the-Silence>
- Expand Life Skills education requirements to K-12 students and make such training available also to parents and caregivers.
- Expand Medicaid billing to include school-based mental health services, including via telehealth, for all Medicaid eligible students (beyond students with an IEP).
- Ensure the state Medicaid program covers services delivered by school psychologists, social workers, and school counselors.

Please note that the above recommendations were gleaned from the Hopeful Futures Campaign's (of which NAMI is a contributor) just-released report: America's School Mental Health Report Card. The full report can be found by visiting: [https://hopefulfutures.us/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final\\_Master\\_021522.pdf](https://hopefulfutures.us/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final_Master_021522.pdf)  
(The recommendations for CT Schools begin on page 39.)

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully

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